

The “Commitment to Constructive Dialogue” project is funded by the European Union



“COMMITMENT TO CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE” PROJECT

GUIDELINES TO INCUBATORS’ ACTIVITIES

1. Introduction

These Guidelines to Incubators’ Activities (hereafter: Guidelines) are based on the incubators’ strategy approved within the framework of the EU-funded “Commitment to Constructive Dialogue” Project (hereafter: Project) and designed to effectively organise the activities of the incubators operated in the scope of the Project.

The Project is implemented with the financial support of the European Union by the “Armenian Lawyers’ Association” NGO in cooperation with its partners, Agora Central Europe o.p.s (an NGO from the Czech Republic), “Armenian Centre for Democratic Education-CIVITAS” NGO, “International Centre for Human Development” Public Organisation, “SME Cooperation Association” NGO and “Union of Communities of Armenia” union of legal entities.

The incubators will organise their activities in 2 (two) phases lasting 1 year, each time for 25 (up to 35, if possible) local CSOs. The first phase will start on 1 February 2017. The Armenian Lawyers’ Association, SME Cooperation Association, Centre for Democratic Education-CIVITAS, Union of Communities of Armenia, and “Agora Central Europe” NGO will appoint experts who will act as mentors and will develop a detailed action plan and timetable of Incubators’ activities jointly with the Mentors Group Coordinator, as well as individual strategies and plans for each CSO member of incubators.

Prior to launching the incubator of the first phase experts from the “Agora Central Europe” NGO conducted a five-day training of trainers for the experts and coordinators of the incubators.

Upon the completion of the first phase of incubators, second round of trainings/discussions will take place, in which the lessons learned and existing challenges will be discussed. The second 9 month-phase for 25 local CSOs will start in the second year of the Project, in June 2018.

The second training/discussion will be held during the fourth month of the first phase of incubators. The lessons learned and existing challenges will be discussed then. The second phase of incubators will be launched in the second half of the second Project year, in June 2018, which is also foreseen for 25 (up to 35, if possible) local CSOs.

2. Mentorship

In the framework of the Project, mentorship is a process in which established and well-respected individuals teach, advise, guide and foster the organisational and professional development of the CSOs that are considered to be their protégés (mentees).

In the framework of the Project, the mentor is a person who has an equal or equivalent position to take on the sponsorship of a mentee CSO (protégé, student), supports the mentee and works with him/her, helping to develop the CSO’s internal and external capacities, establish a solid foundation to ensure the CSO’s sustainability and provide other professional assistance.

In the framework of the Project, the mentee is a CSO representative who strives for the development of CSO organisational capacity, improves his/her professional skills, is ready to transfer his/her rich professional experience, knowledge, abilities and skills to partners and willingly accepts the mentor’s guidance, remarks and advice.

In the framework of the Project, mentorship relations are the aiding and assisting relations aimed at disclosing CSOs’ capacities, advancing their achievements and accomplishments. Mentoring includes emotional and psychological support, direct assistance to career and professional development and the role model component. These relations imply direct co-operation between the mentor and the mentee.

The objective of mentorship in the framework of the Project is the improvement and development of professional activities of Incubator member CSOs in the areas of coalition building and development; evidence-based policy development; public oversight/monitoring; sustainable and constructive dialogue with the government and local government bodies in the process of public policy development, as well as in the 9 Project target sectors, which implies transferring practical tools with the support of experienced and successful specialists.

The Mentor regularly provides support to CSOs throughout the whole period of the incubator’s activity, which implies: guidance on some target areas and directions of activity, transfer of professional knowledge and skills, studying CSO needs and interests, assistance in drafting action plans, as well as defining and realising strategic goals.

There are five forms of mentorship:

- **Group,**
- **Team,**
- **Equal,**
- **Electronic,**
- **Individual.**

Group mentorship: The mentor has a group of several CSOs and acts as their leader, agreeing to have regular meetings with them. During these meetings, the mentor presents his/her own

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professional experience, the success achieved, teaches mentees a number of important skills, or they just participate in interesting events together.

Team mentorship means involvement of several senior mentors in a group of mentees composed of several CSOs.

Equal mentorship: The mentor has the opportunity to engage and/or get support from a young mentor with less experience. The latter, in his/her turn, shall provide additional assistance to the mentee, if necessary, at the same time maintaining his/her positive role in the eyes of the senior mentee.

Electronic mentorship is a form of relations when the mentor and the mentee regularly interact with one another through e-mail or social networks. The mentor must provide the mentee with the relevant and complete information through the Internet.

Individual mentorship is the traditional form of mentorship, when one mentor is linked to one mentee and they are constantly in touch with each other. The mentor provides the necessary information, discusses important issues and provides guidance.

The following individuals may become mentors (experts):

- 1) Representatives of civil society, international and foreign organisations;
- 2) Specialists from RA or foreign universities, organisations working on research and scientific production;
- 3) Sectoral experts.

It is expected to also have sectoral mentors in the 9 Project target sectors.

The following criteria are taken into consideration during the selection of mentors:

- 1) Professional experience and success in the target sector;
- 2) Experience in working with civil society;
- 3) Work experience in the field of development of evidence-based policies;
- 4) Work experience in the field of public oversight/monitoring;
- 5) Work experience in the field of the establishment and development of non-commercial coalitions;
- 6) Work experience in the areas of sustainable and constructive/participatory dialogue between civil society and the government/local government bodies.

The mentor is appointed and/or approved by the Project Manager.

What is expected from the Mentor in the framework of the Project?

In the areas of the establishment and development of Coalitions, development of evidence-based policies, public oversight/monitoring, sustainable and constructive/participatory

dialogue with the government and local government bodies in the policy development processes, as well as in the 9 Project target sectors, the mentor shall:

- 1) Deepen the mentee’s practical knowledge, skills and capacities in the target sectors;
- 2) Contribute to raising the mentee’s awareness of CSOs and developing their organisational capacities, taking into account their specific needs;
- 3) Form an appropriate behaviour, manners and partnership relations among CSOs;
- 4) Develop CSOs’ initiative, skills and professional capacities;
- 5) Give direction to CSOs on their future professional and sectoral activities;
- 6) Contribute to the establishment of communication/ties between CSOs and individuals with common interests and other CSOs (e.g., NGO sector experts, other CSOs, state and local government officials, representatives of international organisations, businessmen);
- 7) Help CSOs discover their interests and set new activity goals and directions to be implemented;
- 8) Present to CSOs his/her own achievements, thus becoming a successful role model for the latter;
- 9) Find the real needs and expectations of CSOs;
- 10) Work with CSOs, helping them to reach their realistic goals, and suggest solutions;
- 11) Be the source of reliable information for CSOs;
- 12) To inspire CSOs to unveil new horizons and fields;
- 13) Inform the Mentors Group Coordinator about the difficulties that might arise in relations with a given CSO.

In the areas of establishment and development of Coalitions, development of evidence-based policies, public oversight/monitoring, constructive/participatory dialogue with the government and local government bodies in the policy development processes, as well as the 9 Project target sectors, the mentee shall:

- 1) Deepen his/her professional knowledge, gain necessary practical skills, ability to act independently, display a desire to establish partnering relations with the mentor;
- 2) Regularly participate in the advice sessions and other events organised;
- 3) Consistently improve his/her professional knowledge and skills, carry out creative work and research, develop his/her CSO’s organisational capacities;
- 4) Co-operate with mentors and colleagues to exchange experience and increase the effectiveness of professional activities;
- 5) Abide by the provisions of the Strategy for CSO Incubators, Incubators’ Action Plan and Timetable;

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- 6) Discuss his/her needs and expectations with the mentor, be willing to perform the actions agreed upon;
- 7) Be consistent with suggestions and responses, inform the mentor about the progress;
- 8) Communicate with other mentees, including acting as a source of information, as necessary;
- 9) Inform the Mentors Group Coordinator about the difficulties arising in relations with the mentor (after consulting with the Project Manager, the Regional Coordinator has the right to discuss the matter of changing the mentor and suggest a new mentor in case of a positive result).

How should the first meeting be organised and what questions should be asked?

At the first mentor-mentee meeting, first and foremost, it is important to get acquainted. That is, preparing a few questions will enable them to get an understanding about each other from the answers received.

Please find below a set of questions that may be asked at the first meeting.

For Mentees

Please describe your CSO’s activities in the following areas: establishment and development of coalitions; development of evidence-based policies; public oversight/monitoring; sustainable and constructive/participatory dialogue with the government and local government bodies in the policy development processes, as well as in the 9 Project target sectors.

How long has your CSO been working and how long have you personally been working for that CSO?

What does your CSO do, has it had any success? Please present it.

Are you personally successful in ensuring your CSO’s financial stability?

What challenges do you face in your work and how do you overcome them?

How would you evaluate your CSO’s organisational capacities in the areas of the establishment and development of Coalitions; development of evidence-based policies; public oversight/monitoring; sustainable and constructive/participatory dialogue with the government and local government bodies in the policy development processes and your CSO’s main activity areas?

What are your strengths and weaknesses in the areas of: establishment and development of coalitions; development of evidence-based policies; public oversight/monitoring; sustainable and constructive/participatory dialogue with the government and local government bodies in the policy development processes? In which areas do you feel there is a need for development?

Why has your CSO chosen this area of activity?

What are the other areas where you would like to develop your CSO’s skills?

How do you ensure the transparency and accountability of your CSO’s activities?

How do you see the paths of your CSO’s development in the areas of: establishment and development of coalitions; development of evidence-based policies; public oversight/monitoring; sustainable and constructive/participatory dialogue with the government and local government bodies in the policy development process?

For Mentors

At first, the mentor provides some information about himself/herself and his/her experience. Then he/she asks the mentee to present his/her organisation or asks the mentee the questions prepared, e.g.:

What expectations do you have from me as a sectoral mentor?

What kind of support do you expect from me and your membership in the incubator?

How do you achieve the statutory objectives and strategic goals of your CSO?

How do you feel about the challenges you face and in what ways do you see their solution?

3. ACTIVITIES OF INCUBATORS

Within this framework of incubators CSOs will get familiar with the main issues existing in the 9 Project target sectors, as well as the reforms implemented, the activities foreseen in the Incubator Strategy, CSOs will receive professional and technical assistance in developing 4 thematic capacities:

- Public budget and policy monitoring;
- Development of evidence-based policies;
- Coalition building and/or development;
- Constructive/participatory dialogue with the government and local government bodies in the policy development process.

In general, the following scheme has been foreseen for the activities of incubators:

1. Development of an individual action plan for CSOs with the CSO and the mentor

As a result of direct work with CSOs and their mentors, individual action plans will be designed for CSOs, including the problems, events, terms and responsible persons.

2. Seminars/discussions and webinars

Practical seminars/discussions and webinars will be held on the application of the practical tools of the topics taught in the scope of the CSO certified training conducted by the American University of Armenia. These include the following topics: establishment and development of coalitions, development of evidence-based policies, public oversight/monitoring, sustainable and

constructive/participatory dialogue with the government and local government bodies in the policy development processes.

3. Professional discussions in the 9 Project target sectors

Professional discussions with CSOs in the 9 target sectors of the Project will be organised.

4. Thematic and sectoral lectures by invited lecturers

Taking into account the activity areas of the CSOs gathered in incubators, thematic and sectoral lectures will be conducted by invited lecturers.

5. Individual and sectoral mentoring

Individual mentoring session will be organised for CSOs, mentoring sessions will be conducted, sectoral mentoring will be carried out for each CSO member of the incubators.

6. Individual visits and business meetings

Individual visits and business meetings with state and local bodies, non-governmental organisations and business organisations will be organised, in accordance with the CSOs’ sectoral activity directions.

7. Visits to Yerevan

Every three months visits to Yerevan will be organised for CSO members of regional incubators. In the scope of these visits, CSO representatives will visit the state agencies coordinating the target areas of the Project, international and business organisations, offices of CSOs operating at the republican level. During the visits, the participants will meet with the managerial staff, get familiar with the activities of these agencies and organisations, the issues and challenges existing in the sectors, as well as the manifestations of cooperation with civil society.

8. Presentation of CSOs’ Success Stories

The success stories of CSOs in the following areas will be presented and discussed:

- Monitoring of state budget allocations and policy implementation;
- Analysis and development of evidence-based public policies;
- Coalition building;
- Policy-oriented constructive and strategic cooperation with central government and local government partners.

9. Provision of legal and tax advice

In the scope of incubators, free information will be provided to CSOs regarding legal and tax advice will be provided to CSOs on the sectoral, as well as tax legislation, and, more specifically, the latest legislative changes in the field of NGOs, including the legal regulations related to entrepreneurial

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activities carried out by NGOs, the institution of volunteering, mandatory audit and other important issues.

10. Provision of other information

Within the framework of incubators, CSOs will be provided with free information on conflicts of interest, whistle-blowing and other organisational, legal and CSO internal capacity building procedures and fundraising, the necessity of which is particularly apparent in the newly formed coalitions.

11. Implementation of social and cultural activities

Social and cultural events will be organised, CSOs will actively get involved in different types of work in the public sphere; there will be visits to different cultural monuments, new approaches to CSO value system principles will be formed among CSOs.

12. Opportunity to use the office, computers and the Internet

CSO members of the incubators located in the Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor, Gavar and Kapan offices of the Armenian Lawyers’ Association will have an opportunity to use the office space and property, computers and the Internet, according to the schedule agreed beforehand with the office coordinators.

The CSOs operating in the Tavush region will have an opportunity to make use of the incubator operating in Vanadzor, those working in the Aragatsotn region will be able to make use of the CSO incubators located in Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor, depending on the territorial location of their CSOs, and those from Vayots Dzor will be able to use the incubators in Kapan and Yerevan.

13. Provision of small grants

The Project will announce a small grants call for incubator member CSOs.

Two phases of small grants tenders will be held in the 2nd year of the Project. Each phase will be announced at the end of the sixth month of the implementation of the corresponding incubator stage.

Small grants will be mainly provided to CSOs and CSO consortiums to carry out effective public oversight, develop evidence-based public policies, create local coalitions for those purposes and carry out sustainable and constructive cooperation with local government bodies/regional authorities.

14. Annual encouragement

Within the framework of incubators, CSOs will be encouraged with annual awards for their activities in the following categories: “Coalition Building and Development”, “Development of Evidence-Based Policies”, “Public Oversight/Monitoring” and “Sustainable and Constructive Dialogue with the Government and Local Government Bodies in the Process of Policy Development”.

The Project will allow for communication with other mentees both at the regional and national levels, during meetings in Yerevan.

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Apart from that, the Project will enable each participant CSO to prepare their own vision illustrating the kind of success they want to achieve both during the Project implementation and, for example, for a three-year period, in the areas of establishment and development of Coalitions, development of evidence-based policies, public oversight/monitoring, sustainable and constructive/participatory dialogue with the government and local government agencies in the policy development process.

4. PROJECT STAFF IN CSO INCUBATORS

Heads of CSOs and CSO coalitions, local, international experts and those from the “Agora Central Europe” Czech NGO will get involved in the work carried out in the CSO incubators envisaged in these Guidelines. Representatives from state and local government bodies, international and non-governmental organisations, business, as well as independent experts will act as invited specialists and lecturers. The invited specialists and lecturers will cooperate with incubators on a voluntary basis.

5. ELECTRONIC LEARNING MODULE OF CSO INCUBATORS

An e-learning module/repository of CSOs will be created on the Project website where the CSO members of CSO incubators will have an opportunity to log in. The educational e-learning module/repository of CSO incubators will contain such important documents as manuals, seminar materials and audio-video recordings, concise materials on the best international experience, analyses carried out in different target sectors, etc.

6. CONSTANT COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE CSO MEMBERS OF INCUBATORS

In order to display the opportunities of CSO members of incubators, disseminate ideas and information, as well as to effectively organise daily activities, groups will be opened on social platforms. CSO representatives, mentors and regional coordinators of the Project will be added there. In particular, a closed group will be opened on Facebook, a social network well-known among CSOs. There, constant communication between the group members will be maintained, various discussions will be held and working documents will be posted.

7. COVERAGE OF INCUBATORS’ ACTIVITIES

The work of incubators will be constantly covered through the Project website and those of partners, as well as mass media. The Public Relations Coordinator of the Project will work directly with mass media outlets, thus ensuring wide coverage of incubators’ work.